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THE MORAL CRISIS WITHIN THE CHURCH

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When Pope Pius X, standing upon the traditional rock of papal authority, issues a decree upon matters of faith, his words carry the weight not only of his sacred office but also of his immense social influence. We may perhaps share Tertullian's amazed indignation, when Pope Calixtus first assumed the right to speak for the whole church—"Audio edictum esse praepositum et quidem peremptorium"—and yet we listen. We listen, because, in this modern world, no interest which concerns the well-being of any part can be of indifference to the whole social structure; and more especially we listen because the movement which in Roman Catholic circles is known as Modernism is a vital and pressing problem in every organized body of Christian believers.

Within the great historic church this utterance of the Pope is of supreme human interest. The elements of a thrilling drama are all present. There, in the person of Pius X, stands the transcendent authority and wisdom of the ancient church. He speaks, not as the Holy Father to his children, but as the unerring guide and teacher of the faithful. The very audacity of his words appeals to the imagination. They are a call to battle. The church is the citadel of truth. The enemy, who are attacking it from within, must be beaten back, hewn down, and utterly destroyed. Here is a will that would stem the current of the world's life; would hold the thoughts and emotions of all the faithful in bondage. The passage of time, the achievements of knowledge, the rise of a new order which has revolutionized social values, are as nothing. Philosophy, science, historical criticism, are but ministers to the supreme dictatorship of truth which is reposed in the papal chair. The reader rubs his eyes. It seems as if the Pope had taken from their resting-places in a museum of antiquities weapons of ancient warfare with which to meet the destructive machinery of modern inventions.

The voice is there, but it sounds like an echo of a far-away past. The will is there, but where now is the authority which it once exercised over every channel of human intelligence and endeavor? The demand is there, but where shall we look for those awful resources of censure and discipline? Will the world, which once trembled at the rebuke of the imperial bishop, now heed the words which demand of the faithful a fearful and unthinking obedience?

The appearance of this papal decree shows that the importance of the intellectual revival among Christian thinkers is not misunderstood or undervalued at the Vatican. The modern spirit is not standing without and knocking as a suppliant at the doors of the church. It is intrenched within, and is claiming its rights of inheritance as the loyal child of the great Mother. The enemies of the church are her adoring and devoted sons. That is the pathos of the situation: the anathemas of the Holy Mother fall upon her own offspring.

The Modernist is in a sorry plight indeed. He is begotten of two great loves. Blood of his blood, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone is the church of his devotion and obedience. He is no Ishmaelite, but the true child of promise. The faith of the church he holds with all the passion of his soul. Its doctrines, its sacraments, its vigils and its fasts, are his by inheritance and by the appropriation of his heart. More than that, his prophetic eye sees in the historic faith and organization the spiritual hope of generations yet unborn. Nevertheless he owes allegiance to another authority. He is the child of another intellectual world. From his earliest conscious moments he has been trained and disciplined in an atmosphere of exact science which knows no final authority save in established truth. To him each new achievement in knowledge is a new revelation of God. To deny this revelation is to deny God. However much he holds in reverence the Doctors of other days, he cannot accept their teaching when it conflicts with the known facts of this present time. He believes that, while the doctrines of the Christian faith were born of the culture of the ancient world, they are not, in the nature of things, forever chained to it; but that it is the mission and genius of the Catholic Church, through its accumulated wisdom and experience of centuries, to

give a spiritual interpretation to every new discovery of knowledge and to every new development of human understanding. He would make the church, not an intellectual dungeon, but the radiant and spacious home of those who walk in the light of God.

He is the citizen of two worlds. Between the love of his heart for the church of his devotion and the loyalty of his soul to the revelation of truth he must tread his bitter way. On the one hand are the joys, the satisfactions, the rewards, of life; on the other the humiliations and sorrows of those who suffer for very truth's sake.

This great moral crisis, which is so acute within the Church of Rome, is present in some degree within all bodies of organized evangelical Christianity. To enter a gathering of one of their councils is to pass into an unfamiliar atmosphere. The observer becomes aware of a certain preoccupation of mind which gives an indirectness to all its proceedings. It seems not to meet face to face the existing conditions of life. It seems to be apart from the real world and to be busily concerned in measuring its thoughts or its actions with a remote, but sacred, standard of truth or government. Its real religious zeal is somewhat deflected from its course by the requirements of conformity to a tradition which is manifestly the creation of another age and other surroundings. There appears to be something almost like a fear that the religion of Jesus may escape from the established system and become a free gift to all men. This is but an extension of the spirit of the Vatican. There is also a Protestant Modernism, and between this and the Mediaevalism which — unavowed and often unconscious — pervades the Protestant churches, lies a wide and unbridged chasm. The tyranny of a traditional interpretation of the Scriptures, the arrogance of an ecclesiastical caste, are the unrelenting foes of the spirit of religious freedom which appeals to this age with a divine insistence.

The Pope has but reasserted the claim of Cyprian, that only by obedience to, and dependence upon, the bishops is union with the church and with Christ possible, for within the church founded by the Apostles is the whole and uncorrupted truth of God—*extra ecclesiam nulla salus!* He turns the minds of the faithful

to that momentous time which Harnack calls "the most fatal turning-point in the history of Christianity"; but even Pius X, with all his power, is not able to bring back again the conditions of social and intellectual life out of which sprang the authoritative and monarchical church.

Looking backwards, we see how essential to the well-being of the Christian communities, and even to the existence of the church, was the individual's obedience to its laws and conformity to its teaching. Submission to outward control is not necessarily a form of slavery, but may be of the essence of true liberty, or a high and noble choice of the individual will. It may well be that the body which exercises authority over each member (as in a great university) is the one efficient source of intellectual and moral life, and is animated by the highest spirit of the age. It may be an army of defence against the attacks of ignorance and sin upon the social body. It may be the champion of justice and righteousness. It may be the teacher of wisdom, and lead the hearts of men to the love of truth. It may hold up a standard of devotion and self-sacrifice and heroism in the pursuit of a noble cause. It may, in short, gather together into a living and powerful organism the hopes, the aspirations, the moral sentiments, of the age.

If the church cherishes this high ideal of its mission and destiny, then it may indeed be the home of all ardent and generous souls. However glorious its past, its divine opportunity is in the present. Whatever its sacred possessions, they must serve to interpret the will of God to the minds of men. No true disciple of the living Master can be wholly moral by conformity to the standards or requirements of any other age. It has been said of the Pharisee that he was a moralist a generation behind his time.

It is this ecclesiastical preoccupation with the mental and moral attitude of another age which keeps the church apart from the actual life of today. Men see this sacred institution stirred with activity, eager in propagandism, compassing sea and land, and zealous in a hundred forms of good work. Its immense services to the welfare of humanity are justly valued; yet its power of moral leadership is steadily slipping from its grasp. The voice which speaks in the name of God and proclaims the ancient authority of truth is no longer heeded in the great centres of

learning. The church still appeals to the faithful; but the mighty stream of human activity passes it by.

It must nevertheless be recognized by any observer of social conditions today that the church holds the strategic position of moral opportunity. With its venerated past, its sacred traditions, its divine commission, it reaches, as no other institution can, the deepest sentiments and the noblest impulses of our generation. To it therefore is committed the opportunity and responsibility of leadership; and it is at this point that we meet face to face the great moral crisis which confronts every form of organized Christian faith.

For moral leadership is a high and mysterious quality of soul in the individual or institution. Its appeal is to the imagination, for it must invest with a glowing sentiment the unrealized aspirations and unfulfilled purposes towards which a generation is struggling. In these it must see the most radiant, the most enduring, realities of the age—those commanding objects of desire which appeal to the ardor and devotion of generous souls.

That, surely, was the romance of the early church. The humblest believer leaped from his obscurity into the arena of life. He became endowed with the dignity of an ambassador, and set forth on his astounding mission to win the world to Christ. In his passion for righteousness and in his fearless zeal for the revealed truth lay his power over the wills of men. The Jewish faith had drawn many worshippers into its cult by its pure monotheistic teaching and by its noble ethical standard, but the followers of Jesus sought for nothing less than the establishment of a world-wide Kingdom. The church incorporated into its body religions, philosophies, social customs, politics, secret societies—all the interests, activities, longings of men—and glorified them with an enthralling faith.

It is just this quality to fulfil and justify every high and out-reaching human passion, to uplift it with faith in a divine moral order, that gives to the church its moral opportunity. The church will be heard so long as it proclaims in the name of God the reality of those spiritual premonitions which are known, not through the eye of sense nor by the outward experiences of life, but are the soul's inward witness to the eternal good.

Thus the authority of the church cannot be a power once bestowed, nor a grace which trickles in a narrow channel through the ages; nor can it rest upon a norm of truth or conduct once established: its authority is rather in its divine commission to lead every development in human understanding and in social betterment on towards the supreme ideal of life which is secure in its faith in God.

If the church is powerless to reproduce the conditions of life and thought—the ambitions, the sentiments, the limitations—of the period out of which came the sacred symbols of its faith, its real commission still remains, which is to lead towards God the uplifted life of devotion and enthusiasm of every age. To-day, in a thousand pulpits, the church is rebuking the spirit of selfishness, of materialism, of lawless passion for gain or power. Yet this is not enough, for its great mission is to manifest a purpose so detached from self-interest, so free from mental preoccupation, so ready to surrender privileges and possessions, so full of understanding towards every ray of light which makes clearer the path to God, so zealous and devoted to every cause which reveals the love and care of God for his children, that all men can turn to it for fellowship and guidance.

Nothing less than this is the price of true and universal moral leadership today. We are a people of high enthusiasms and spiritual adventures. But the most significant quality of our age is its originality—its readiness to break away from accustomed forms, from familiar and conventional channels of expression. There is unquestionably a change of intellectual attitude, and a temper of investigation towards all authority, so deep and far-reaching that even the most conservative observer is startled. And it is this which is surely forcing Christian leaders to a reconsideration of the place and worth of the church as a social institution.

Even the casual reader knows that the authority of the church in the past has been based upon intellectual leadership. The church was never a mere eleemosynary society. It never limited its work to the function of worship. It was the teacher of the truth. Sainthood and scholarship went hand in hand; the great Doctors of earlier days were the intellectual giants of their

times. Now it is a distinguishing feature of our age that the sense of the sacredness of truth, of its supreme and compelling authority, of its divine source and of its infinite variety of revelations, makes one of the great moral passions within the souls of men. If the moral value of conformity has lost its place, there has arisen among the common people a feeling for intellectual integrity which calls out the devotion of a religious faith.

The children of democracy have been fed on the food of liberty; and liberty has meant that there shall be no obstruction in the path of development nor hindrance to the fullest attainment of personal right. It has meant, in the higher sphere of intelligence, that the pursuit of knowledge and understanding shall break through all barriers of tradition in its way towards the goal. It is chained to no method; it accepts no results as final; but it is animated by a high enthusiasm for the ultimate victory of truth over error. A generation ago the scientific world was arrayed for attack upon the great and inert mass of tradition with which religion was identified. It had one mighty weapon. The leaders of the scientific method had the ears of the young. They sat, too often, in the seat of the scornful, but always in the seats of learning. They appealed to the ardor and the generous impulses of youth. They taught a wonderful new knowledge of which the ancients never dreamed, based, not upon the traditions of the past, but on the new understanding of nature's laws.

A great many foolish things have been said of what is called the "scientific spirit," and many enormities have been committed in its name; but no words can over-magnify the immensity of the revolution which was brought about when the young scholar was trained day after day in the ways of exact knowledge, and when little by little his soul was filled with the inspiration of intellectual integrity—and by integrity was meant, not conformity to any past tradition or law, but the full acceptance of each new revelation of truth which was discovered and classified through the study of man and nature. In this great principle of the authority of truth, and of the moral quality in every form of study and investigation, a new and wonderful moral motive was given to the common man as well as to the scholar. If it

led him away from accepted norms, from familiar traditions, it yet awakened within his soul those qualities of devotion, of sacrifice, of consecration and enthusiasm, which are the fruit of a true religious faith. He saw in the orderliness of law, in the tracings of development, and in the varieties of form, a vision of the mind of God. He found in these a basis of a moral world. He discovered the ground upon which to rest his assurance and confidence that "all things work together for good."

No institution can today hold the authority of moral leadership which does not to the fullest degree appeal to this great moral passion for the enlightenment of truth. The schools and the universities are truly leading towards a high and noble faith; for it is a marked characteristic of all our great institutions of learning that freedom of investigation and study, freedom from all outward restraint or control, has been lifted up into the realm of moral law. The day of the sectarian college has passed. It is out of step with the march of the age. The teacher of a system is discredited. It has become recognized now that a teacher is commissioned to obey but one authority, and that that authority is the truth.

How much this means to the church of Christ is the grave question which meets us on every hand. It must be acknowledged that the whole mechanism of the church was adjusted to a scheme of things that has passed away. No Father or Doctor who labored and strove for the truth of God in other days could have dreamed of this surging spiritual tide which has swept the minds of men out of the chartered course—not Irenaeus, who saw a basis for immortality in the legends of Jonah and the three men in the fiery furnace; not the great Origen, with his extravagant allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament; only Jesus, the great Modernist, revealed the law which reaches to the very core of our life today: He that willeth to do the will of God shall know the truth. Is the church of Christ then anchored to the teachings of the past? Or is the church fully and utterly committed to teach the faith that the law of God is the law of life?

The seriousness of this question cannot be overstated. The formularies and rites of every religious body are the sacred vessels in which have been handed down from generation to generation

the revelations committed to its keeping. Through the mist of centuries the part which human passion or the limitation of human understanding played in the structure of these hallowed symbols can be but dimly seen. To most disciples of any particular form of faith or polity it seems as if its "deposit" of truth were a divine gift. This possession is in no sense conditioned by the development of human knowledge. It is from above and is absolute. It is therefore definitely declared that the church of God is not commissioned to proclaim the truth—as men understand truth—but to preserve the tradition which has been handed down through the centuries. Between a world which exalts intellectual integrity into a high moral ideal and an institution which demands of its disciples either indirectness or limitation of thought there can be no abiding union. It would not be strange if a mind preoccupied with the church of Cyprian should lose somewhat of its fine sensitiveness to the moral spirit of today.

But the aim of all true religious faith is illumination of mind and heart. To this great purpose the church of Christ is committed. It enshrines the ideal life. It bears witness to the reality of spiritual experience. Therefore on its ideal side it is bound to no past; it is fettered to no system; it has no inherent authority. Its high commission is to proclaim the faith—the faith which has fired the saints of every generation—in the supreme relationship of human souls to a loving and righteous God.

Never was a greater opportunity afforded to the church than now to give the richness of its experience, the sacredness of its traditions, the full flavor of its religious life, to sweeten and inspire and direct the lives of men. The scientific mind without the glow of religious feeling cannot finally satisfy the cravings of the soul. The achievements of the laboratory or the discoveries of the telescope may add greatly to human knowledge and widen the horizon of human minds. But the true leadership for which this hour calls is that of religious faith—it is the assurance of the value of life interpreted in the terms of religion. It is to gather up the results of modern knowledge into a divine synthesis which will illuminate the teachings of the past and give to the present a noble and inspiring purpose. The age of the prophet is upon us—the prophet who shall understand the aspirations, the hopes, the discontents of the time

—and whose clear and spiritual eyes shall see the revealed purpose of God in this seething and flowing life. Society is crying aloud for moral leadership. It is creating new ideals. This is an age of reverence. It hungers after God.

It can hardly be questioned that the roots, not only of the historic church but of every body of Christian believers, were planted deep in a social soil which was inimical to democratic ideals. The spirit of the churches is the selective spirit. By their structure and by their doctrines they are, when literally interpreted, out of tune with the master music of our age. It is true that even the monarchical church, within its organization, opens the opportunities of a democratic society to its members; and yet as a social institution it represents to the masses of men those special privileges of selection and class against which the best life of this generation is in deadly warfare.

To these masses it seems that the church is outside of, and apart from, the great moral struggle to make all men free men within the City of God. What else is the literal interpretation of the historic rite of baptism? We are told that "all men are conceived and born in sin," and that "none can enter into the Kingdom of God except he be regenerate and born anew of water and the Holy Ghost." Did not the Fathers rightly interpret this conception when they declared that there was no salvation without the church? Was not Calvin right in proclaiming that church-membership was the essential condition of enfranchisement in a righteous city? It may seem to us that the long debate about post-baptismal sin was a strange misconception of the spirit of Jesus; but through the smoke of intellectual battle we can discern the clear and strong purpose of those who were building into a mighty order of caste and privilege the spiritual truths which were revealed for the larger liberty of all mankind.

Perhaps in no other doctrine can the immense change in religious understanding and sentiment be more clearly seen than in the attitude of believers towards this mystical and touching rite. The social and parental feeling has issued its decree of love and hope, and nailed it on the door of the universal church. We may philosophize about evil, but no loving parent can ever again

accept the monstrous doctrine that the child of love is "conceived and born in sin." Against the authority of the church human consciousness has raised up a higher authority, and dictates in the voice of a diviner truth to the souls of men. What is this higher authority? To the answer of this question the great social movements of our time are directed. The long-established relationships of life are bending to the pressure of a new and irresistible power. The old order which enshrined reverence and authority in parenthood, in office, in social caste, in education, is giving place before the demand that every claim of right or privilege shall be valued by its inherent worth and by its service to mankind. From this upheaval of settled customs, this ruthless examination of long accepted authorities, the church cannot be exempt. The severe process of readjustment of relations through which society is passing is most surely awakening among all classes a universal and sensitive motive of social responsibility. What Wiclif saw in vision seven centuries ago is working itself out, through the throes of social struggle, into the society and government of today. "The law of social obligation is based upon the law of God," and there resides in no institution or office, however sacred, any authority which can contradict the enlightened conscience of the people.

We hear much, and rightly enough, of the service of the church to other generations—of its zeal for souls, of its protection of learning, of its struggles for righteousness. But today we are in the midst of undreamed of conditions; of a situation for which the church has made no provision. Organized Christianity grew into its full strength with the growth of the institution of feudalism; and feudalism was not only a form of social structure but was also a temper of mind: its genius was force. In the close and dependent relationship of overlord and vassal two great social principles were evolved—authority and obedience. If the church began by relieving the individual of his personal responsibility, it ended by taking from him every attribute which makes life important in itself.

Now it is just this consciousness of the importance and value of life to the individual that has seeped down through the strata of caste divisions into the souls of the masses of toilers. We are met

therefore not so much by a readjustment of social relations as by a violent upheaval of an established order. The rise of industrial democracy is the phenomenon of supreme human interest in our generation. Its huge body has lifted itself through the crust of settled traditions and forms and institutions—dividing, breaking down, scattering, overwhelming, with little enough concern about the past or the future. It is a great, brutal, material giant. It demands rights, claims privileges, and compels the attention of the world. It does not appeal: it strikes. It does not ask a hearing: it roars its commands. Yet it is not a drunken giant. On the contrary, it is singularly firm and persistent and determined. It fills its own world. Its attitude is that of attack. It is alert, watchful, self-contained; and its bitter antagonist is the social structure of class and privilege. It hopes for no heaven, and it fears no hell. Yet it is tender towards its own. It is inspired with the passion of brotherhood; and its protecting arm, which is so ready and strong to strike its foe, is gentle and loving when it enfolds the weak and poor.

In itself this uprising of the toiler is a startling departure from the old, simple relationship of protection and dependence between the overlord and vassal in society or church. It is creating new and perplexing problems in the industrial world. It is changing constitutions and affecting governments. It is uplifting new social standards and making new social values. But the full significance of this revolution cannot be grasped until it is interpreted in the terms of a vast moral awakening, for behind all its good and evil lies the great vision of the worth and importance of the individual life.

It has been often pointed out that the official ministry of the church grows less and less attractive to the generous-minded youth of today. Even its unique opportunities for human service and its noble passion for the salvation of mankind fail to appeal to the imagination. As a whole, the church remains strangely detached from the vital interests of the masses, as well as from the controlling spirit of the intellectual world. The questions of government or doctrine with which it is so largely occupied imply a different condition of life and thought. They are lingering memories of a world that has passed away. The divisions of Protestantism have

become temperamental rather than doctrinal. Even when the church deals with the problems of social change, its way of approach is unfamiliar to the modern mind. It is still concerned with its endowment of rights and privileges, its traditions and forms, which it holds to be essential elements of its life and authority. It has still something to preserve which is alien to the social spirit of our time, in place of its authoritative utterance that the prophetic message of the compelling law of God is forever modern.

Yet in the moral awakening which underlies the rise of industrial democracy there has developed an unattached ministry in which the joy and the hope of the early church seem to be born again. Here we find the renaissance of the romantic spirit which is forever associated with a passionate loyalty to Jesus. In this dawn of the new age of human brotherhood, the lives of the social worker and the civic reformer alike are striving, with divine conviction, toward the supreme sacrifice of the Son of Man. The new ministry of the justice and righteousness of God sees with a new intensity and clearness, from the Mount of Vision of this twentieth century, the one figure which inspired the disciples of an earlier dawn. "It was the image of a young man giving up voluntarily, one by one, for the greatest of ends, the greatest gifts; actually parting with himself, above all, with the serenity, the divine serenity, of his own soul; yet from the midst of his desolation crying out upon the greatness of his success, as if foreseeing this very worship. As centre of the supposed facts which for these people were become so constraining a motive of hopefulness, of activity, that image seemed to display itself with an overwhelming claim on human gratitude. What Saint Lewis of France discerned, and found so irresistibly touching, across the dimness of many centuries, as a painful thing done for love of him by one he had never seen, was to them almost as a thing of yesterday; and their hearts were whole with it."

It is this spirit which breaks away from the classic forms and restraints of institutional life, and flings itself, in the abandonment of love, into the very heart of the human tragedy. This spirit bestows no charities, and makes no sacrifices; but it fills with the wine of life those privileged souls who can share in the hopes, the discontents, the struggles and the aspirations, of the masses

for whom are opening the gates of a new life. The prophetic eye may see again the inspired vision of the Messiah who is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who bears the burdens of his people and leads them out of captivity into spiritual liberty. If the moral fire has died out of those old basic words, authority and obedience, it has lit up with a new radiance the watchwords of our time, co-operation and fraternity.

Can the church, into whose keeping is committed the religious welfare not only of a selected few but of all mankind, stand apart from this deepest and most far-reaching of the human interests of today, isolated by the very glory of its history, and dehumanized by the sacredness of its possessions? Is it not just because it is the accepted custodian of religion that there is given to it the inspiring opportunity of gathering into a divine synthesis all the vast and divided interests of social life and charging them with a moral dynamic? While the fear and jealousy of sectarianism are driving all religious teaching from the public schools, where shall we look for the spiritual guide who shall teach and train these wild and wayward human wills into the larger faith? Who shall teach this individual of the new social order to add to his own personal interests the interests of the whole social body; teach him that his soul can be lost in no deeper hell than that of absorption in his own business or pleasure; teach him personal responsibility for the wrongs of society or government; teach him that the outcast and forsaken, the ignorant and degraded, are members of the social family; teach him, amid his fierce struggles for personal rights, that the highest value of life lies in personal responsibility.

These are the vital and insistent questions which a democratic society may ask of the church today. In a civilization in which industry is divorced from religion, religion from the state, and the state from the most vital problems which threaten its existence, the cry for moral leadership arises from the very heart of a bewildered people. To the church has been intrusted the stewardship of great possessions which are the gifts of God to all mankind. The faith it holds, when set free for human needs, is not only the driving power of moral endeavor but the controlling power of moral restraint.

With so great riches, yet one thing more is needful—that painful thing done for the love of Christ—the surrender of its own, that it

may give back to the hungry world the spiritual faith in the Son of God. The preconceptions of the feudal church must yield before the rising tide of the ideals of a social democracy. The dream of a material empire, the lust of power, the isolation of exclusive doctrinal systems, must be absorbed in the passion of a loyal discipleship which would be as its Master, for where the Christ stands there must his church stand also. "He stands at the gates of the twentieth century, waiting till the lagging people overtake him. Then he will lead the tired and famishing into his city of love."